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TORQUE TUBE

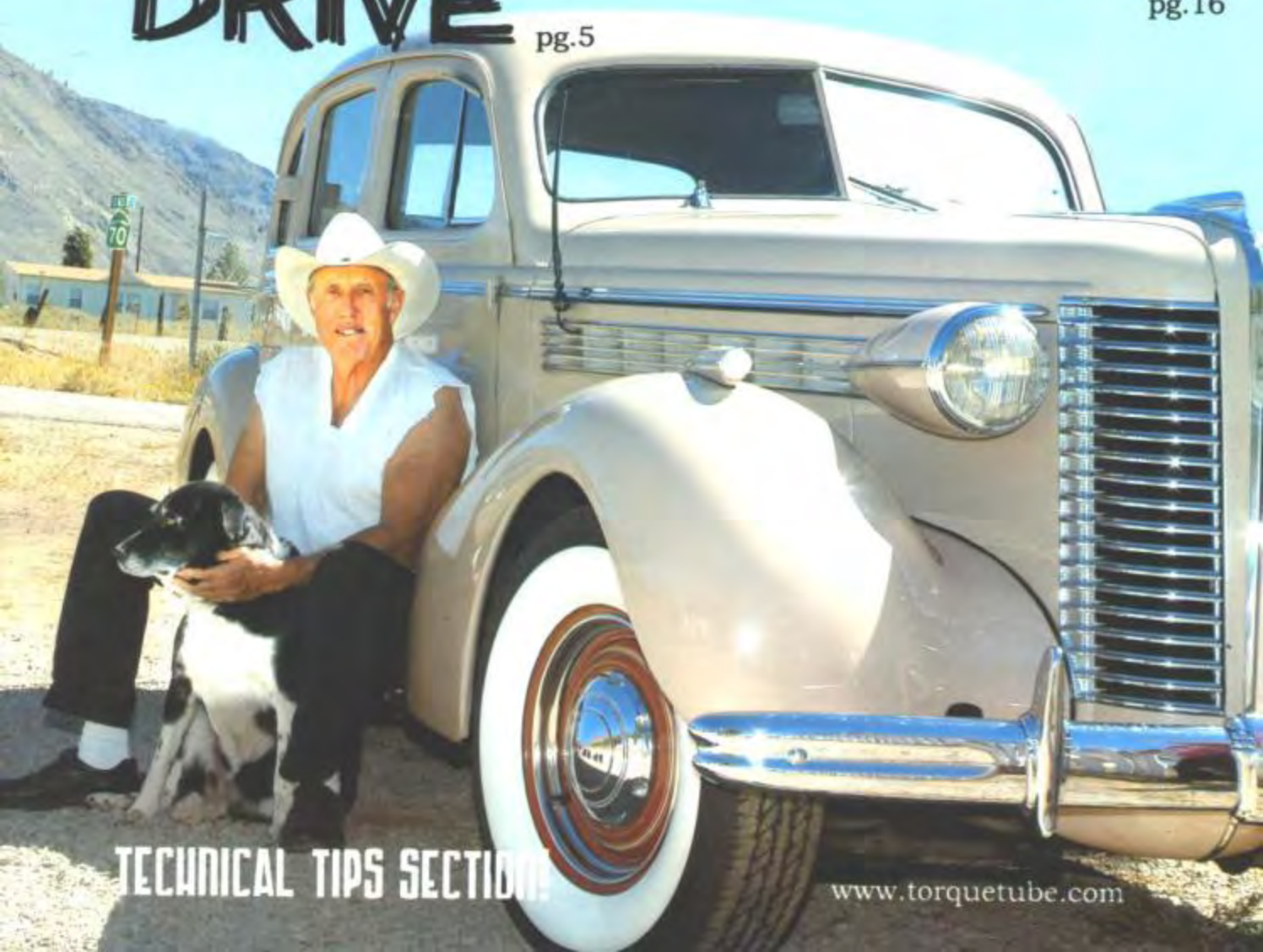
THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS PUBLICATION
FOR MEMBERS OF THE 1937-1938 BUICK CLUB

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TECHNICAL TIPS SECTION!

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TORQUE TUBE



Founded in 1980 the
TORQUE TUBE
is published every two months
for the education and enjoyment of the
1937-1938 BUICK CLUB
World Wide Membership dues
Are \$40.00 per year.
Membership year is
September 1 to August 31
of the following year.
Persons joining during the year
receive all back issues
from September 1.
All payments must be in U.S. funds.
Please make your check payable to
1937-1938 BUICK CLUB.

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The **BUICK CLUB OF AMERICA.**

1937-1938 BUICK CLUB web site:
www.torquetube.com

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9TH Buick CYLINDER



After five and a half months of recovery from my broken leg, I'm able to drive my '38 Special again. It is a thrill to know I can drive my Buick and start off the new publishing year in good health. I sent the summer off with a bang at this year's Great Gatsby Picnic in Oakland, California. Dressed in period clothing, hundreds of pre-war car owners (including several of our members) brought their cars and held elaborate picnics around them. Above you can see Don Howell (#559) with his 38-41 and the famous Deco Belles.



Mark Garcia (#1390) and his wife showed up with his 38-41 too, but he decided to rest and sleep the afternoon off in the beautiful sunshine.

CLUB NEWS

As we start the new publishing year I want to introduce a new member, and our new designer, Tanoa Stewart (#1823). Tanoa has been a graphic artist and vintage enthusiast for over 10 years. He has also been the webmaster of our website www.torquetube.com since its conception last year.

I have good news on the license plate badges. John Evers (#1695) can produce the badges and will handle distribution. We will give you all the information in our November/December 2004 issue.

Bob Ward (#114) wants to announce that the 2005 Eastern Club Meet will be held June 13th to 16th in Lindsay, Ontario, Canada. Also please keep in mind that since 9-11, it is a good idea to have a passport when traveling in and out of the U.S. It's never too early to apply for one. There will be a full-page ad in the next issue with all the details, but if you have any questions now you can contact Bob at: the37limo@sympatico.ca.

As far as a calendar for 2005, it's not too late to send pictures. I have only received a few pictures big enough to work, so I'm still looking for submissions. If I'm able to put it together it will be advertised in the next issue.



Walter Fowler. The setting is his Grandfather's camp in Pike County, Pennsylvania. His Grandfather started buying Buicks when Auburns were no longer available, hence this family's enduring love for these fine machines. After Bill found this picture it became even clearer why his Dad loved his '38 Century so much. Unfortunately Bill needs to sell his dad's Century. If you think you have a good home for her, you can see the ad in the "Cars for Sale" section on page twenty-six.

Harry Logan (#651) sent me this very rare photo of U.S. soldiers in Europe in World War II sitting in a converted 1937 Buick. Notice the camouflage paint and all the added seating.

Bill Fowler (#1195) sent in this family photograph, taken around 1938. This was his Grandfather's 1937 Buick. Pictured left to right is his Uncle Wyland, his Grandmother Lila Mae Fowler, and dad





New member Ron Tavares (#1813) in San Lorenzo, California, just bought this '37-40C. He plans to do a full frame-off restoration. Ron saw this car over fifteen years ago and tried to buy it then. Unfortunately, the previous owner wouldn't sell it and let it sit outside and become more decrepit. Thanks to people like Ron, it will come back to life. Good luck on your restoration, Ron!



Another new member, J.D. Thornton (#1787) from Natchitoches, Louisiana (Chief Administrator, Natchitoches Parish Sheriff's Office) bought this '37-46 from Dr. Curtis, who brought it here from New Mexico in 1999. He's going to do frame-off restoration, too. Here are some pictures: the first are of when he picked it up from where he found it sitting in a field near Campti, Louisiana. We think he's getting some work done in the prison body shop.





One of our members from Norway, Sverre Christoffersen (#1491), sent me these great pictures of his restoration project. I assume due to rust (and other issues), Sverre needed to weld major replacement sections onto his car in order to bring it back to its original glory. Sverre promises to send us more information in the future about his project.



It is not often that I talk about members that don't have cars, but Stephen Kanyusik (#1754) is one excellent exception. 84-year-old Stephen is a WWII and Korean Navy war veteran. He served as a war photographer and was stationed on several aircraft carriers through out his career. Stephen is a big admirer of 1938 Buick Coupes. He is willing to swap original WWII and Korean War action photographs and a museum quality 4X5 Speed graphic Signal Corps camera, complete with an official metal case, for a restored 1938 Buick Coupe. If you are interested you can reach him at 586-268-4615. The

Torque Tube would like to thank Stephen for his love of our cars and his service for our country. Here's a picture of Stephen in his uniform, and one with Tony Curtis at the Navy Memorial.

I hope you enjoy this issue and please feel free to send in your stories, pictures and technical tips. I can always use more stories, information and support from our members.

Happy motoring,

Mark



THE COVER STORY

DILLARD: DRIVEN TO DRIVE

By Giancarlo Davis (#1748)

Photos by Mark Jordan (#1297)

Mike Dillard's modest dwelling, a small, weathered house in Beckwourth, California, seems to be as remote as a Himalayan monastery. It's located between a lonely stretch of highway and a large swath of valley. Looming in the distance, the shadowy, fang-like ridge of the Sierra Nevadas cuts into a seemingly infinite, deep blue sky. He's a few miles from the nearest small town, while the closest city is Reno, which lies well over forty miles away. (Sacramento lies an easy two hundred miles

ease, braving infernal heat, hellish cold, and some of the country's most bedeviling traffic congestion.

Needless to say, Mike likes long drives--really long drives--in any of the classics he owns (such as his 1938 Buick), or is restoring (like his 1953 Buick). He's driven to Las Vegas and through Colorado (where his worst problem was a bout with vapor lock and the scores of dead insects that plastered the front of his car), through extreme temperatures and over treacherous mountain passes.



southwest.) Distance hardly fazes this rugged driver of a dashing, beige 1938 Buick 41. He drives to Reno from Beckwourth on a regular basis and frequently ventures almost three hundred miles into the San Francisco Bay Area to car shows, club meets, and other such gatherings. His '38 ascends and then descends Highway 80 through Donner Pass into Sacramento and the great beyond with

Mike's furthest excursion took him to St. Louis, Missouri. "We took off from our old place [in Beckwourth] and drove for four days in the '38. We had almost no problems. Except that when we were on our way there, I had one tire that was messing up the tube, and I got a flat. I changed that quickly and the rest of the ride was a breeze. I've got radials on it

now. The difference between the old tires and the radials is like night and day." A ride in Mike's '38 attests to that: with the windows rolled up, whispered voices are louder than the sound of the car on the road. It takes to the pavement like a lover to his lady; the '38 seems to gently stroke the road, kiss its curves and almost snuggles up to stops.

Mike's affection for Buicks (he also owns a sable-black 1947 Roadmaster) takes its roots in the manufacturer's skill at making durable, reliable cars. He also grew up around the legendary vehicles. "My dad always had a Buick. He said that if you wanted to have a car that would start when you got up in the morning, get a Buick. Until the Cadillacs and other cars came out with the overhead valve V-8, they were the best cars on the market. The other cars with the flat heads would have sparks that would jump and if it rained, or even if the engine got damp, it was a mess. It was the '38 Century that finally beat em', flat-head wise. My first car was a '36 Buick and then a '37, then a '40. Back in the Fifties, a friend of mine and I were driving around in the old San Leandro mud flats in our '37 Buick. It got stuck up to the frame in mud, and it stalled. We just walked away from it. We never went back to get it."

His '38's engine, though, has been slightly modified for such a smooth ride, and helps alleviate typical problems that are common with vintage car engines. "I put in an electronic ignition. But when we went to St.



Louis, we had points in it. The road's the same, whether with points or with electronic, except now you don't have to reset them all the time and the timing is always in time. Cooling system-wise, all I did was put in a new radiator core. And it's been modified with four-pounds of pressure. There's an overflow tank on it, too."

To Mike, overheating shouldn't be a prime concern for anybody, even if they opt to drive from Tierra del Fuego to the North Pole. "Everyone is worried when the gauge goes up, but unless it's spilling on the ground, you don't have to worry about it," Mike insists. "I listen to everybody's talk, and I think that's why people put idiot lights on. I drive my '38 all the way to San Jose and the gauge will go all the way up, because it gets HOT when you get down there. But you have to realize that the gauge only goes to 212 degrees, and you've got coolant that's good 'til 245-250 degrees. But the gauge only goes to 212. And these cars are running between 212-230 degrees all the time! I think that's one of the reasons that people don't drive their cars for long distances. They're scared of them! When the car's not pressurized, what happens is that when you pull in to park you'll spill all the stuff out on the ground. My dad had one all through World War II. And we used to go to Sacramento all the time!"



Mike Dillard, his wife, Joan, and faithful dog Bullet next to their 1938 Buick Special.



But for those that tend to be a bit more skittish about temperature problems, Mike suggests a coolant called Evans Cooling. "With that, your car can run up to 375 degrees with no problem. It's truly the cat's meow." Even in heavy traffic Mike remains unfazed. "Even if they keep the car running and it's stalled in traffic, people are afraid of their gauge, which only shows the temperature reaching up to 212 degrees. These cars are running hotter than that anyway. If that gauge goes all the way up, it doesn't really matter. These engines were made to heat up to that kind of heat."

Fueled by a vehement ethic of self-reliance, Mike believes that, in many ways, people keep a distance from their cars by not learning how to keep them up. His successes on his longer drives have much to do with his eagerness to learn about the mechanics of his '38's engine. In fact, many modern mechanics as well tend to shy away from doing very much work on classic cars, including most '38s. "The problem is that you get some guy that doesn't know how to fix cars and then there's no garage that they can go to. Where are they going to go? Most garages you pull into, the mechanics will say, 'We don't work on those!' And even if they happen to like to work on the older vehicles, the mechanics don't know



where to get the parts. There's easier money to be made than to mess with these! So consequently, these guys that own their own cars and can't work on them themselves are really screwed!"

At the end of each ride, Mike's wife, Joan, disembarks to return with a bottle of cleaning solvent and water and proceeds to swab the chrome at the front end of the car. "The bugs are the worst part of these long rides," Mike sighs. "And that really ought to be the worst of it. The thing is, a car is like a horse. If you

want to ride him a ways, like into next month, you ride him every day before then. The owner of a Buick ought to be able to climb into his or her Buick and go wherever he or she wanted to go, no matter how far. If you let the car sit in the garage for six months

**"THESE ENGINES
WERE MADE TO
HEAT UP..."**

[Mike typically doesn't drive during Beckwourth's white winters], then you got to be doing something and checking things out. Vehicles are just like people. If you sit on your butt the whole time and you get fat, then you can't do anything. The same thing happens to a car. If you don't drive it for a long period of time, it won't start up immediately and may not start at all. You've got to keep it in prime condition if you





brand new upholstery in them, and most of the time they don't really go anywhere with them. In the 1960s, I had a '49 Buick, which I sold in 1962. I restored it and painted it, but I really didn't have any fun with it. You couldn't buy the original upholstery, and it turned hard, too. And I took my mother-in-law to Las Vegas, and didn't even let her have a bottle of water in it. We took the '38 to a show in Las Vegas, and when people looked inside they asked when I was going to re-upholster it. I'm not into having the car look just perfect. I would rather have the original upholstery in it with a few tears. So when I want to have a cup of coffee, I don't have to worry it spills on the seat."

Lastly, Mike sagely suggests that enjoying your ride, no matter how far the journey, is the most important aspect of driving. He never feels like

want it to go somewhere. Whenever any little thing breaks, fix it as soon as you can, and then drive the heck out of your car, even if it is once a week."

With the understanding how the engine works and having the capability to be your car's minuteman mechanic and medic, hundreds of miles of cross-country driving can be no more detrimental to your beloved car than backing out of your driveway on a perfect spring morning for a drive down the street.

Furthermore, Mike doesn't treat his car like a shelved trophy. It's a car, and despite its excellent physical condition, he doesn't want to make it look like it's an automotive bauble bound to rest in a museum. In fact, he likes the dust and dirt (though maybe not the bugs so much) that somewhat sully his prized vehicles. Perhaps the residue may stand as a reminder of the many miles the car has driven. "The Buick's original color is beige, just a shade darker than what it is now. Initially, I hated the color until I got inside and drove it. I think now the car could be dirtier than heck and the dirt just won't show. Now, I don't mind the dirt so much. Everyone these days wants a spit-shined look to their car. They want



he's competing with the newer cars on the road, and feels comfortable passing semis at a leisurely pace. "You can get a better speed if you took about 100/1000th of the head and raised the compression up. But the best thing is not to race anyone. People of all ages can be real fools. They're in a hurry all the time and they're not getting anywhere!"



THE

20 YEAR RESTORATION

By Giancarlo Davis (#1748)

Photos by Ernest Zocchi (#83)

“Ashes to ashes and dust to dust”—an ancient religious text once said in regards to mankind’s temporal state of existence in this world. But to the eyes of Ernest Zocchi, the text might as well have read “ashes to ashes, and rust to rust.” The gravel-voiced owner of a 1938 Buick has had to endure what must have felt like an eternity as he saw his beloved ‘38 run rugged through a season in hell in the bungling hands of an incompetent restorer.

The season started in 1978. Zocchi found the ‘38 within the pages of *Hemmings Motor News*, for sale by someone in Duxbury, Massachusetts. “The guy I bought it from had it in a barn and they opened the barn door, and there she was. I took her for a drive and I ended up taking her home. The guy I bought from purchased her from a professor Texas.”

Though it had lain dormant for a while, the car roared into Zocchi’s life after he turned the key and took it for a test run. Then, owning the car for some time, he decided it needed some work. “So I started taking the car apart, one bolt at a time.”



First, it wasn’t so bad. Zocchi was making some kind of initial progress with the car. “I found a guy in Yonkers who started to redo the dashboard. And he’s the only one that did it the best that I know of. I also had a friend from Sweden help. He did the clock, the odometer, and all the intricate stuff.”

For the larger, more complicated restorations on the car’s body and engine, Zocchi sent the ‘38 to a mechanic that did a devil’s dance on the car and then practically sold it back to him the way he found it: a ramshackle tomb on wheels with a fresh, drab, slab of paint. “After I bring the car to this guy, the brake line’s broken when I get it back. He replaced a perfectly operational gasket with another in my vent. It was a piece of brown material. I couldn’t believe it. And as far as charging me, he went over me like a fine-toothed comb. He charged me for my brakes, a blowout which I never had and then proceeded to break my two trunk



And when Zocchi opted to seek remuneration or, more significantly, to seek retribution by confronting the accused, the so-called mechanic faded away, moving to Florida to bilk other doe-eyed drivers out of their hard-earned cash. "One night a few weeks after I picked up the car from the restorer, I go to a show and on the way home I hear a couple of BANGS and the next thing you know, the brake line is broke. It busted right on the highway! I brought it home using the hand-brake, going only about tewnty miles an hour. This guy didn't safety check my car, didn't do anything. I had to do the brakes all over again. Charged me for everything and did nothing. Absolutely *nothing*."

Eventually, he got the car back, but it had taken an immense amount of time for the car

hinges. He damaged one of my front fenders, and then simply painted over it. I had to fix the brakes myself, as well as the steering column. Everything had to be done at least three times."

"I hear a couple of BANGS and the next thing you know, the brake line is broke!"



to be in the condition Zocchi deemed decent. After he had initially purchased the car and sent it to the rogue restorer, Zocchi intended to chauffeur his eldest daughter to her prom, but it wasn't ready yet...and wouldn't be for another two decades. "I wasn't able to use it until 20 years later when my youngest daughter got married. I got it back two months before and we used the car for the wedding."

**"THE CAR IS
A RARE
BEAUTIFUL
PIECE OF
WORK."**

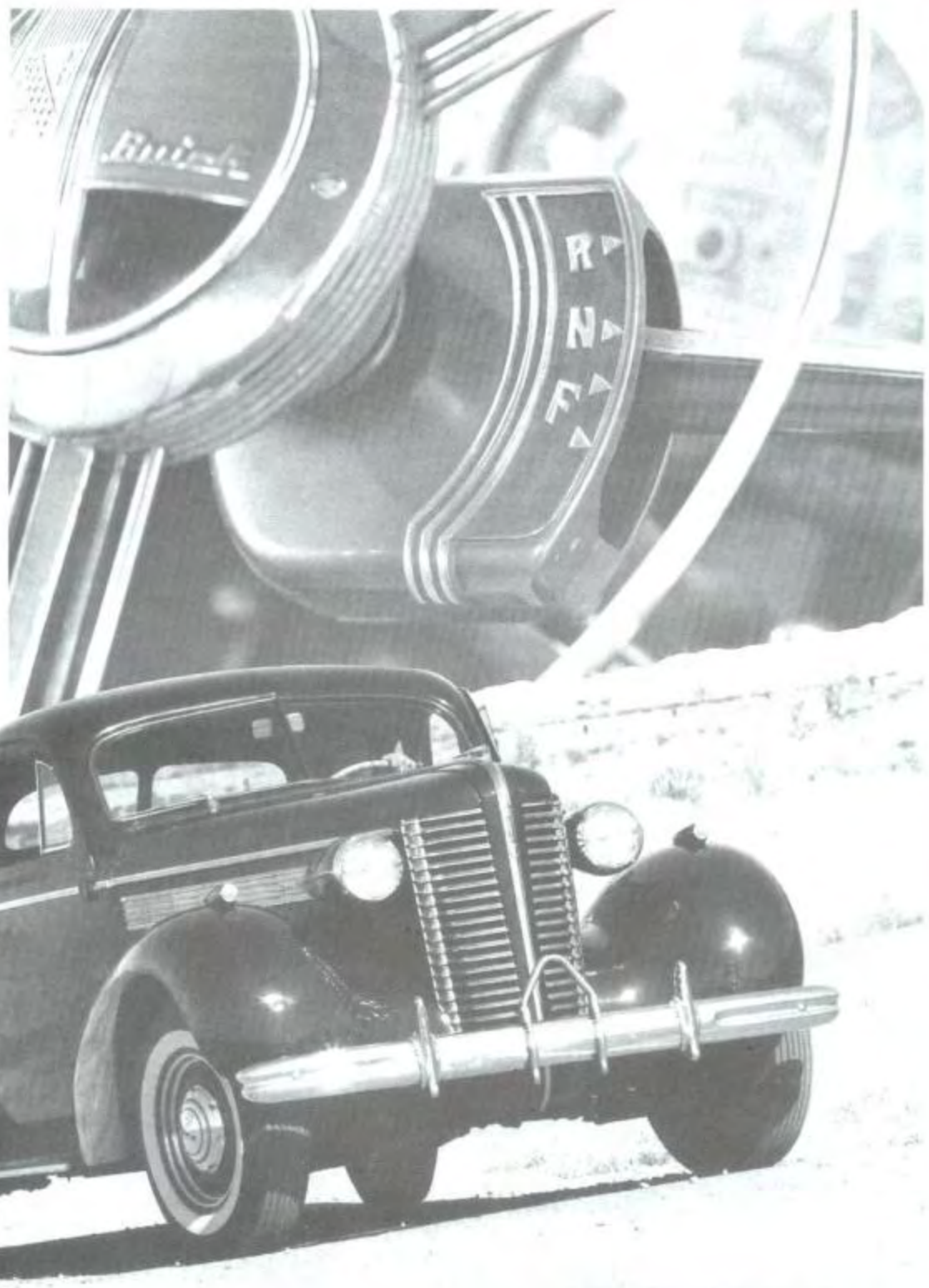
But though his pocketbook was virtually drained, as was his confidence in depending on the restoration industry, Zocchi's patience and dogged determination has paid off. The car is a rare, beautiful piece of work. "The 91 Limiteds were bigger and typically had jump seats that folded down in the back. Ours just have the machine gun cabinets. The engine's a bit bigger than the 1938 41 Special. It's really like a



taxicab. There's plenty of room, and it has tons of horsepower, too. But it also wasn't as reasonably priced as the 41, which was more like your modern car, where you gotta squeeze yourself to get in there. I personally think they look decent and they also run better."

Though Zocchi's experience with his beloved 91 Limited has made his temper run higher than an overheating engine, he has no intention of selling it. "I've gotten several calls through the years from people who wanted to buy it when I was trying to finish it. I said no way. For all the dough I put into it, I'm not gonna sell it for thirty-five grand! Look, the car's had two motor jobs, two brake jobs, and has been repainted a beautiful Rembrandt black. I figure if someone really wants it, I might sell it for \$386,000. But then again, probably not."





ALMOST AUTOMATIC

Reprinted by permission from *Special-Interest Autos*, Jan.-Feb. 1974

We're testing this transmission in the wrong car. It ought to be in an Olds rather than a Buick. The semi-automatic was much more Oldsmobile's baby than Buick's. And while it's true that Buick manufactured the Automatic Safety-Transmission for Olds from June 1937 through September 1939, Oldsmobile actually stood behind its development and got it ready for production.

So few of these semi-automatics still exist though, that we felt lucky to find one at all. Our test car, a lovely 1938 Buick Special business coupe, was kindly lent to us by Harrah's Automobile Collection in Reno, Nevada. We'd been curious for some time to find out what the semi-automatic felt like-how it performed and how *we* performed behind the wheel-so we drove this Buick out into the hills behind Reno and gave it a thorough trial.

In boning up about this transmission, we'd read that the factory recommended starting out in LOW range and then shifting by hand into HIGH range at about 20 mph. We tried it that way first and then also tried starting off simply in HIGH range. We found very little difference in acceleration, and of course, in HIGH range we eliminated that one manual shift.

The transmission has a total of four forward gears. LOW range starts out in first gear and shifts automatically to second, then holds it there. You power-shift by hand, but without using the clutch and without letting off the gas pedal. At that point, the transmission goes to third gear, and the final shift to fourth is again automatic. That's how it performs if you do it by the book.

But we soon found, as did most owners, that it's much simpler to start off in HIGH range. If you do that, it's automatic all the way. You do lose second gear, though. In HIGH, the transmission moved off in first gear, then shifts automatically to third gear, and finally shifts to fourth, again automatically. We decided we didn't miss second gear, and acceleration didn't suffer very much.

Yes, the semi-automatic does still need the old clutch pedal. You use the pedal when starting, stopping, idling, or shifting past neutral on the column selector. We felt what we thought at first was some clutch chatter during rolling starts. But we soon found it came from the transmission directly. What caused the chatter we don't know, probably adjustment. We understand that the Automatic Safety-Transmission was very sensitive to engine tune, temperature and internal adjustment.

We talk about this transmission being "semi-automatic" because there's that old devil clutch still on the floor. Actually, it's automatic except when starting and stopping. The only thing it lacks is the Hydra-Matic's torque converter, which al-

lowed enough slippage to eliminate the friction clutch. There's the same kick-down for passing, so if you're driving along in fourth gear and want to accelerate quickly, tromping the gas at any speed between 23 and 55 mph immediately engages third. And up-shifts respect that magic combination of car speed and acceleration, the "brain" that



GM semi looks a lot like Hydra-Matic, but sans torque converter. This one discovered recently, still in its crate, by a Palo Alto Olds dealer. H-M Div. bought both for display.



Here's where a standard 1938 Buick would plant its shift stick. Now there's room for three. GM called semi-automatic a "safety" trans because the driver could keep both hands on the wheel.

distinguishes this transmission from rival semi's and full automatics of its time.

You can hold the accelerator to the floor, and shifts come at high end of the rpm scale, just as they would if you were trying to get the best from a manual-transmission car. The final shift to fourth comes around 55 mph under full throttle but at 28 mph in normal driving. The shifts themselves feel smooth but *are* noticeable. Yet the engine doesn't rev unrestrainedly during shifts.

In rolling to a stop, we did find the down-shift back to first gear rather too forceful, with a solid clunk around four mph. But we understand Olds

remedied this in the 1939 version of the semi-automatic. To go into reverse, you have to push inward on a chrome button in the end of the column lever, and you also have to pull the lever toward you, same as shifting into reverse on a manual-transmission car column shift.

This semi-automatic was an ancestor and direct link to the Hydra-Matic transmission of 1940. Development of both was fraught with difficulties. R&D boiled down to years of cut-and-try.

The man initially in charge of the program was Earl A. Thompson, inventor of synchromesh. Thompson was one of those rare inventors who had knocked on GM's front door from the outside, had been let in, was given a hearing, and who eventually sold GM his idea. Cadillac put Thompson's synchromesh into production in 1928, and Thompson stayed on to become Cadillac's assistant chief engineer (in 1929) under Ernest Seaholm. It was at Cadillac, that Thompson first began the research that eventually led to Hydra-Matic.

The project started in 1932 with the purchase of several outside patents. It was Thompson's habit to buy up potentially conflicting patents, as he did with synchromesh, too. Since all sorts of other semi-automatic and fully automatic transmissions were being developed during the 1930s, it seemed only a matter of time before one or several would become commercial successes. Daimler had introduced the (non-automatic) fluid flywheel in 1930. Vicker-Coats had a true torque converter at that time, and there were transmissions in various states of auto-

Buick Special business coupe has an ample trunk, but it's augmented by a huge storage bin behind the seat. Semi-automatic cost \$80 in 1938



matic called Spontan, Grade, Mono-Drive, Reo's first Self-shifter, plus several more. No-clutch shifting was being advertised widely, as were preselector gearboxes and, of course, over drives Even free-wheeling made people conscious of the need and potential for automatic trans-

missions. Henry Ford was trying to develop one, so if nothing else, GM was covering bases and accumulating patents through Thompson's research.

In 1932, Earl Thompson was given a tiny lab and a 2-man staff to work on what was code-named the "Military Transmission." This sign on the door was simply to disguise what was really going on. There was nothing military about it.

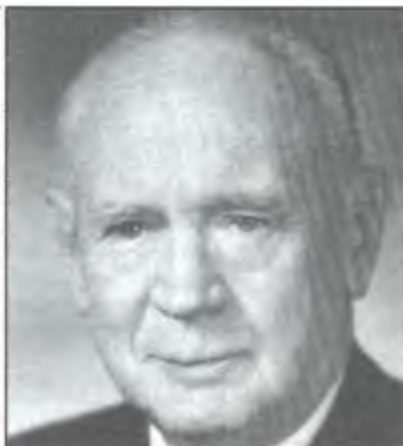
Earl's first two teammates were Ralph F. Beck and Walter B. Herndon. Beck designed the gearbox for early versions; Herndon worked on hydraulic controls. (Herndon left the project in mid-1935, but rejoined Thompson in 1939 to refine the final Hydra-Matic for production.)

A year or so after the Military project started, Earl added two more staffers: William L. Carnegie and Maurice S. (Rosy) Rosenberger. Carnegie worked on controls and general development, and Rosenberger ended up with full responsibility for testing the early prototypes for reliability. The transmissions, at that time, were pretty unreliable.

Late in 1934, Cadillac decided it could no longer afford the Military project, so in January 1935, Thompson's entire operation was transferred as a product study group to GM's Central Staff under corporate engineering VP O.E.

Hunt. Thompson got two small offices in the GM Building, plus a room in the research labs.

It was here that Charles L. McCuen, general manager of Oldsmobile, got wind of the Military Transmission. Olds was at the time GM's most forward-looking division, thanks largely to McCuen, who was one of the corporation's most forward-looking executive engineers. McCuen was named v.p. of engineering for GM in 1940 and then research chief in 1947, succeeding Boss Ket. For the moment, though, McCuen saw great potential in developing an automatic transmission, so he decided to put up the



Earl A. Thompson, developer of synchromesh, pioneered work on semi and Hydra-Matic.

To shift into reverse, driver depresses clutch, pushes chromed button inward into column lever, then lifts up and toward himself.



money for it and hoped eventually to bring it out as an Oldsmobile option, which, of course, he did.

There then began a period during which both Olds and the Thompson group worked side by side. Thompson's staff kept doing basic research, while McCuen, along with his very capable chief engineer, Harlod T. Youngren, got the transmission ready for production.

Says William L. Carneigie: "If you keep something like this in the development stage, you can keep developing it indefinitely. You come to a point where you ask is this suitable for production? Once you release it for production, you get it out a lot faster."

McCuen, Youngren, and Oldsmobile worked very quickly after deciding on production. There was no chance, though, to finish a suitable fluid coupling or torque converter at this stage, so Olds decided to go ahead with the semi-automatic gearbox and use a conventional disc clutch and floor pedal.

When time came for actual production, GM's central staff decided that Buick had greater plant capacity than Oldsmobile, so the gearboxes were built in Flint rather than in Lansing. Buick also built axles and other parts for Olds at that time. At any rate, the first Automatic Safety-Transmission appeared on an Olds 8 in June 1937, and Buick waited several months before offering it. The Olds version cost only \$80.00 extra, even though Buick charged Olds \$180.00 to supply the gearboxes. Olds later made this transmission available on the 6 as well as the 8.

The semi-automatic wouldn't interchange with a standard transmission because of differences in size, so it had to be a factory installation. When something went wrong with one of these transmissions, GM instructed dealers not to try to repair them but simply to return them to the factory. Gearboxes were torn down, inspected, repaired, and records kept on failures. This way, by the time the fully automatic Hydra-Matic came along, a good deal of field testing had


already been done by owners.

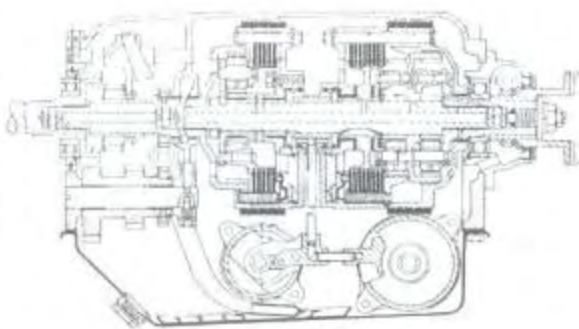
Innards of the semi-automatic's gearbox were very much like the Hydra-Matic's. It had two planetary gearsets in series, one ahead of the other. Sun and ring gears were held by clutches and bands. The automatic selection of most efficient gears was controlled by a centrifugal governor. Shifting from one gear to another was by hydraulic pistons that controlled the brake bands and clutches within the planetaries.

In first gear, the bands for both gearsets were held tightly against the drums, so power flowed through both sun gears. In second, the forward band released to duct power through the rear gearset. In third, the gear band let go and the rear clutch engaged. In fourth, both bands released and both clutches engaged for direct drive. Reverse used a separate set of convention gears.

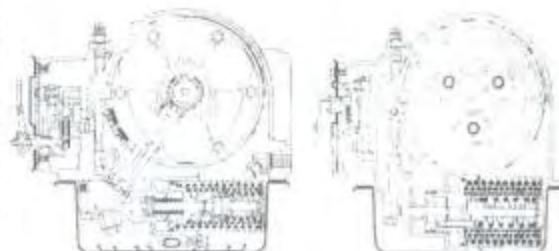
Olds and Buicks equipped with the semi had higher rear axle ratios rather than standard models, giving a 20% "overdrive" in fourth. This meant that at 27000 rpms, a semi-equipped Olds was cruising at 65 mph while its conventional cousin was doing only 53 mph. Olds claimed 12% better acceleration when using all four gears. (gear ratios were changed for 1939.)

Other semi-automatic advantages included 2-hand steering at all times, thus the "safety" epithet; an unobstructed front center seat, with no stick on the floor; longer engine life, and less gas and oil consumption.

We haven't been able to find out how many Automatic Safety-Transmission-equipped Olds and Buicks were sold. Estimates put the figure at less than 7% of 1937-39 Olds/Buick production. So the Hydra-Matic's granddaddy wasn't a rampant bestseller by any means. But this reluctance on the public's part is understandable, because the Reo Self-Shifter and other mid-1930s shifting aids promised a lot more than they delivered. So the public was a little gun-shy by that time. However, a less reputable automaker than Oldsmobile wouldn't have been able to put the semi-automatic and Hydra-Matic over at all. 



Semi-automatic gearbox has four forward gears, with two sets of planetaries. Bands and clutches inside case are actuated hydraulically. The controls sense load and shift accordingly. Reverse comes by a set of non-planetary spur gears.



Front views of front (right) and rear planetaries show the bands around outer gears and adjustment screws at the top. Below planetaries stand the servo units.

WHAT IS IT?



By Paul DeLucchi (#1246)

That was the question posed by the PreWarCar website back in August, along with the picture you see here. The answer is still unfolding, and it's a fascinating one.

First, meet Hans Compter in Kamo, New Zealand (north of Auckland). "When I first laid eyes on the body in 1984 I knew it was a rare bird indeed." Compter liked the shape and style. "Plus, the year before I had driven a 40-series Buick sedan from Brisbane to Sydney, Australia, a distance of about 1000 km, and was quite impressed with its performance and tons of torque."

Compter has been a collector of rare cars since the 1960s; his museum numbers nearly 100 cars. "As a policy, we keep only one car per make, and the rarest which passes through my hands usually ends up staying. Once I found out exactly what model this was, and the low number of them built, I put it in storage to await its turn to be restored."

How low a number? Buick built just 21 of these, and only nine were right-hand drive. Look closely--can you guess the model? To all accounts it's a 1937 Century Model 67X (for export). That's not all--word is that this one was once in the ownership of the Commander in charge of the U.S. Air Force in New Zealand during WWII. Compter relates, "The man I bought it from had come to live in Glenbervie (near Kamo) on a forestry contract and had come from the city of Hamilton, south of Auckland. The USAF had an airbase there during WWII. The seller told me the story about the WWII-USAF ownership, and when

I noticed the remains of a pennant on the front fender and the grey airforce color under the yellow paint, I concluded that the story must be true."

"Unfortunately, I have not found the firewall plate--it may have been stolen off it many years ago. My son Dennis and I have studied the chassis and the body under the firewall and conclude that the car was originally RHD. Maybe the USAF bought the vehicle secondhand. One needs to remember, of course, that the war in the Pacific started rather abruptly for you Americans after Pearl Harbor, and there may not have been time to ship staff cars out from the USA to faraway New Zealand."


"This rare Buick deserves to be brought back to life."

The car's chassis is in sound condition and it came with two engines, one of which is the original one and mostly overhauled. All the mechanical parts of this 67X were stored indoors but the body ended up living outside and now heeds major attention. "Presently," Hans continues, "we are spending so much on other restorations that the only way to get the Buick 67X done is to offer it for sale, so that the buyer can provide the finances to bring it to a good end." Compter would like to hear from parties intrigued by this unusual '37: compter@igrin.co.nz. "This rare Buick deserves to be brought back to life."



At Compter's auto shop, "we specialize in difficult projects. Often such projects are of historical importance, or the car is the only known survivor, and for that reason alone needs to be resurrected. Right now we are working on a 1923 Benz 6-cylinder (one of 3 known to exist), a 1926 Austro Daimler, a 1917 Saxon Cloverleaf Roadster, a rare 1924 Fiat 519S, a 1925 Lancia Lambda, a 1923 Isotta and a 1966 Daimler."

There's an advantage to having work done in NZ. "The hourly rate is so much cheaper than in the U.S. We offer skilled work by top craftsmen at only \$30 U.S., at the present rate of exchange." The asking price of U.S.\$3750 is of course negotiable depending on whether Compter's shop would be asked to do the restoration work.

Visit www.prewarcar.com/privates/hans-compter# to see some of the splendid results. 

SAFELY REMOVING HUBCAPS



TECHNICAL TIPS

The best way to remove hubcaps without scratching the painted rim is to wrap the tip of a long (12 inches or so) screwdriver with a rag, insert it between the hubcap and the rim, then give it a quick hit with the palm of your hand. Be sure to have a helper holding on to the hubcap so it doesn't fall on the ground. If you are alone, use a blanket to catch the hubcap.

It tends to work best if you tap the handle of the screwdriver first to get the rag protected blade firmly down in between the hubcap and the rim, before giving it that last hit with the palm of your hand. Make sure the rag also covers the screwdriver shaft where it touches the beauty rim. Sometimes the hubcaps really fly out, so have the blanket spread out several feet from the rim.

TUNE-UP YOUR HEADLIGHTS PRE-1940 CARS



TECHNICAL TIPS

Originally published in the *Torque Tube*, April 1988

Sealed-beam headlights were installed as factory equipment on all U.S.-built passenger cars on 1940 models except Crosley, Bantam, Willys, and Graham, and immediately the lighting equipment of approximately 30 million cars then on the road became obsolescent. The vastly superior road illumination, which did not tend to seriously diminish with time, prompted many owners of pre-1940 cars to retrofit sealed-beam equipment. The car collector of today, however, in the interests of authenticity, is often faced with the necessity of doing the best he can to get along with basically inferior lighting equipment on his collector car.

While it is unlikely that the owner of an antique or pre-1940 vehicle can expect to get night illumination equivalent to that provided in modern cars, it should be possible to tune up the system so that his car can be operated safely during the hours of darkness. Many owners are understandably reluctant to even operate an antique car at night, but in case one is delayed on a trip or tour, it behooves the owner to have some capability for such article to offer some suggestions. It is the purpose of this article to offer some suggestions for improvement of your lighting equipment.

AUXILIARY DRIVING LAMPS

A pair of auxiliary driving lamps was popular accessory equipment in the pre-1940 era and still is today on antique cars. They will go a long way toward remedying an inferior lighting situation. Auxiliary lamps are available in both regular and sealed beam versions, and while it is a moot question if sealed beam auxiliary lamps will be regarded as authentic in all quarters for pre-1940 cars, there is always the possibility that they can be readily removed for critical judging in car shows.

Auxiliary lamps are often used carelessly, being aimed more or less willy-nilly, the attitude being that they rate there more for looks, not effectiveness. But if properly aimed and adjusted, they can contribute about 100% in improved lighting. Lighting experts suggest that the left auxiliary lamp be connected to the high-beam circuit to give improved lighting down the road. The right auxiliary

should be connected to the low-beam circuit and aimed to illuminate the right shoulder of the road.

The use of auxiliary lamps imposes an extra burden on the lamp circuits; with the result that excessive voltage drop may reduce the output of the entire light system to the point where nothing is gained by adding extra lamps. It is essential the lighting circuits, and in some cases the wiring size, may have to be increased, or light circuit relays be employed, in order to realize the full advantages of auxiliary illumination.

THE LAMP CIRCUITS

The candlepower of any lamp bulb is very sensitive to voltage. A 10 percent reduction of voltage applied to the lamp bulb results in a 30 percent reduction in candlepower, while a 20 percent reduction reduces the candlepower by almost one half. When you consider that there are as many as 10 to 20 connections in the typical headlight circuit, from battery post back through the frame of the car to the other battery post, and many of these connections are casual metal to metal contacts subject to all kinds of corrosion, it is a wonder that our headlamps on the old car work with any degree of efficiency whatsoever.

The slightest bit of corrosion anywhere in the lamp circuit can, and often does, cause a significant loss in voltage at the lamp. The first thing to check, of course, are the battery terminals, cables, and ground strap, but you will probably already have taken care of these points in routine maintenance.

To check voltage drop in the lighting circuit, a low-voltage DC voltmeter will be most useful. If the test prods that come with the meter are not adequate, replace one with a lead about six feet long with a large battery clip on the end. Solder a sharp prod to the end of the other lead. Connect to the battery clip to a good ground on the frame or to the ground terminal of the battery. Touch the other lead to the lamp body. With the upper beam on, there is, it indicates that the lamp body is poorly grounded to the frame of the car. The lamp mounting bolts should be sanded to remove rust and the assembly tightened. Test again, and if the

condition persists, check the connection between the fender and frame for rust and corrosion. Tighten the fender bolts and headlight mounting bar if the car has them. In extreme cases, it may be necessary to solder a ground wire from fender to frame, but this should rarely be necessary.

Next, attach the battery clip of the voltmeter lead to a hot terminal on the car—either the ungrounded battery terminal or the hot side of the starter switch. Turn on the high beams and pierce the insulation on the high beam lead with the sharp tip of the test lead as near the headlamp socket as possible. A voltage drop greater than 0.4 volt with a 21 cp lamp or 0.6 volt with a 32 cp lamp is considered excessive. All connections and elements in the lighting circuit must be checked. To check the units, leave the battery clip on the voltmeter on the hot terminal. With the high beam on, apply the test prod in turn to the ammeter terminals, fuse holder, lighting switch terminals, and the foot dimmer switch. If excessive voltage drop is discovered in any of these units, improve the contact by sanding, or replace the unit.

Other sources of trouble in old cars may be traced to frayed or broken strands in the wires, corroded terminals, or poor insulation due to wear or soaking in oil. In many cases, the only solution is complete replacement of the wiring.

THE LENS AND REFLECTOR

In almost every case, the lenses on a given make of car were designed to be used with reflectors from the same lens manufacturer. The use of mismatched lenses and reflectors is quite likely to result in improper light distribution. Most lenses will have a notch, or lug, so they can be mounted only in a certain way, so the use of incorrect lenses for a given make of car is a practice to be discouraged. The lens gasket should not be neglected in restoration—a dried-out or broken gasket will allow moisture and dust to get inside the lens and on the reflector.

The reflector must be thoroughly clean and highly polished. Only a silver reflecting surface will give satisfactory results. Chrome-plated or nickel-plated reflectors are relatively ineffective, yielding only about 60 to 70 percent the reflectivity of a polished silver-plated reflector. So, if your restoration shop suggests use of chrome plating on the reflectors, don't do it, unless you plan never to use your

car at night.

Never touch the surface of the silver reflector as fingerprints will quickly tarnish it. Clean the reflector by dusting with a soft cloth. Reflectors can be polished with a mixture of lamp black and alcohol applied with a cotton or chamois swab. Rub very lightly in a radial direction (center to edge) but never in a circular motion around the reflector. Commercial silver polishes cannot be recommended as they are too harsh and remove too much of the plating. If the reflector does not polish up because the silver is worn through, it should be replated or replaced. A bent reflector cannot be straightened accurately to its original contour, and should be discarded.

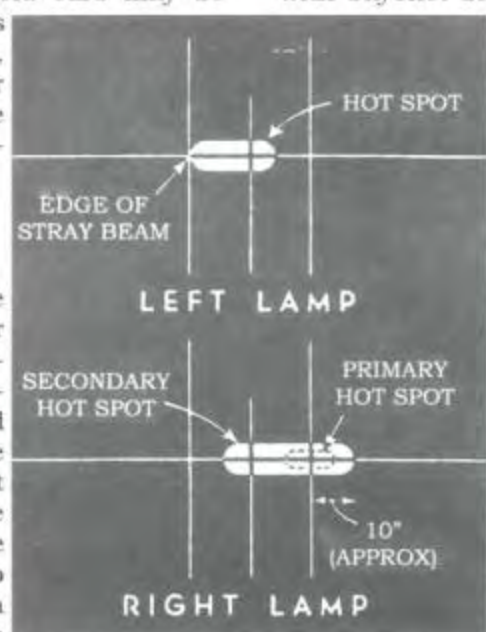
THE LAMP BULB

Lamp bulbs which have begun to show signs of blackening on the inside of the glass are near the end of useful life and should be replaced at once. Be sure to use the lamp bulb recommended by the manufacturer of your car. When replacing bulbs with bayonet bases such as 1000, 1158, or 1116,

be sure to refocus the headlamps after bulb replacement. Most cars starting about 1936 or 1935 use the pre-focused type 2320 or 2330 bulb. No refocusing is required for these lamp bulbs, but be sure that the three hold down lugs on the socket enter the slots in the bulb base flange; then turn the bulb to the right so that the lugs are in the extreme ends of the slots.

AIMING THE LAMPS

It is almost impossible to supply brief aiming instructions that will remain in accordance with all manufacturers' recommendations. We checked a few owner's manuals and shop manuals, and the headlight aiming instructions, while basically similar, differ considerably in fine detail. Some specify aiming while the car is empty and others with the weighting of the normal complement of passengers. We even found one set of instructions calling for aiming with the lenses removed. There is some universal agreement: all instructions we read call for aiming on the high beam; the design of the lamp then automatically takes care of the low beam. The other area of agreement is that aiming should be done on a screen exactly 25 feet from the front of the headlamps.



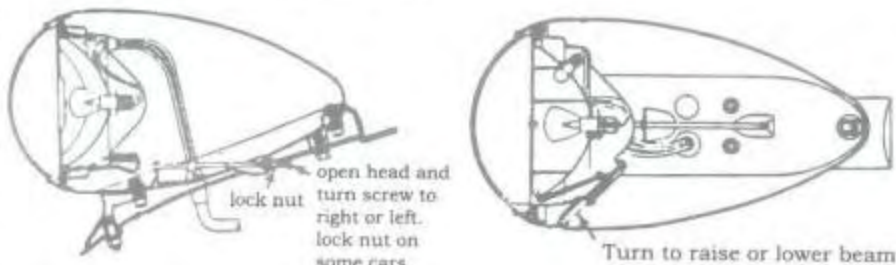
Preferably, you should follow the instructions of the manufacturer of the particular make and model of your car as outlined in shop and service manuals; however, if information is not available for your car, you may safely use the data from the following pages for headlight aiming as taken from *MoToR* magazine, January 1940.

For correct aiming, the headlamps must be adjusted both laterally (side to side) and vertically (up and down). To establish lateral and vertical aim, set a screen (garage wall may do), exactly 25 feet in front of the headlamps on level ground. Sight down the center of the rear window and over the hood ornament to the screen and mark a vertical line on the screen (tape will do). [This method of getting the centerline assumes that your car "tracks" perfectly - not always the case] Draw a horizontal line distance from the ground to the center of the headlamps. Measure the horizontal distance from the centerline of the vehicle to the center of the

headlamps and draw short vertical lines on the screen corresponding to the center of each headlamp.

If your car is equipped with focusing screws on the back of the headlamps, first adjust the focus of each lamp. Turn the adjusting screw until the "hot spot" (brightest area of the beam) as seen on the screen, is as narrow as possible from top to bottom.

When adjusting the aim of the lamps, cover one at a time while adjusting the other so that stray light does not interfere. For location of aiming adjustments screws on our 37-38 Buicks, see the diagrams below.



SIX VOLT VERSUS TWELVE-VOLT ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS FOR OUR PREWAR BUICKS

By Clive Merry (#1814)

Following on from comments made in the July/August 04 *Torque Tube* article regarding the shape of headlamp lenses, it has been my experience that most original equipment inside the headlamp shells was jettisoned many years ago during 12 volt conversion in a quest for better lighting and better starting. Little if any thought was given to authenticity or to preserving the aesthetics of the frontal design when viewed side-on in the rush to graft a 12-volt sealed beam headlamp with a flatter glass into the Buick shell. It is my opinion that the integrity of the total design of the frontal aspect, comprising the epitome of forward thrust, is sadly compromised when the headlamp glass appears virtually flat. Furthermore, most of the o.e.m. parts removed during the change were consigned to the garbage bin, meaning that today, whilst lenses can be sourced, it is more difficult to find buckets and adjusting screw hardware should a return to stock be desired.

If a car is being restored to be a show winner then there is no option but to stay with 6-volt o.e.m. and good luck to anyone whose car does not have the correct components in their search for it.

However, if usability is an issue then the following suggestions could be of help to allow total practicality while still retaining use of the original very convex lenses.

LIGHTING ISSUES

One of the driving forces behind 12-volt conversion was to obtain better nighttime visibility through the proven ability of a 12-volt bulb to glow brighter than a similarly sized 6-volt unit. However, in both cases performance is governed by good grounding through the body and chassis to complete the electrical circuit. This deteriorates slowly over time due to factors such as dirt, rust, and loose and broken connections. Also, the original wiring, whilst adequate when fully insulated, is prone to short circuits through disturbance and consequent breakdown of this rubber and fabric-style insulation. Therefore, it is fundamental to top lighting performance to have wiring and grounding systems that are right up to scratch. Attention to these matters alone will significantly improve lighting output, especially in 6-volt systems.

Another component to deteriorate over time is the reflective ability of the reflector dish behind the bulb. The cure here, if not converting to sealed beams, is to find a plater with the ability to re-silver the dish. Usually, a jeweler or trophy engraver will be able to assist with a recommendation and referral. Renewing the gasket between the lens and the dish will prevent a build-up of dust on the inside of the glass and preserve the new silver finish of the reflector dish.

The headlamp bulbs originally fitted to our cars are now referred to as the American Prefocus type and were common to 6-volt Volkswagen Beetles, as well as many quite modern motorcycle headlamps. The base configuration and external shape and size of the globe have been duplicated with quartz halogen internal technology and these bulbs are readily available in both 6- and 12-volt ratings. I have used these successfully in a 6 volt system and have found them to produce a much whiter light, but would not recommend using bulbs with a current draw of more than 35 watts on either filament, unless wiring to them is of a heavier grade than that supplied originally.

Yet another way of improving night-time visibility is by the fitting of headlamp relays in the lighting circuit so that current flow and voltage drop through the switchgear is reduced, resulting in more power at the bulb and consequently better lighting.

Probably the simplest and most effective way of providing more light is by the use of auxiliary lights mounted on the bumper irons or windshield posts and variously referred to as driving lights, fog lights, or spotlights. These hugely improve the drivability of an old car at night, but lead to matters such as battery capacity and charging rate that require consideration so as not to end up with a drained battery and a non-starting car after prolonged usage. This then follows on to the second major reason for 12-volt conversions—that of starting issues.

STARTING ISSUES

It has been my experience that a properly maintained 6-volt system will have no problem starting a small series straight-8 so long as it is in reasonable mechanical condition and a good state of tune. Problems may occur, however, if the fuel has to be drawn right from the gas tank, or if winter temperatures are way colder than anything we experience here in New Zealand. Obviously, components such as the starter motor, battery, generator/alternator, fuel pump, carburetor, and wiring all need to be up to the mark.

Because our older cars tend to sit for extended

periods, the fuel will evaporate or run back down the line so that there is none being supplied to the combustion chamber when attempting to start a motor that has not been run for several weeks. This is why the fitting of electric fuel pumps is common, but I would argue that if it is only the supply of fuel for an initial cold start that is required (and given that the mechanical fuel pump is perfectly capable of keeping up once the motor is running) why not fit a bulb pump from a portable outboard motor tank in the fuel line next to the mechanical pump? A way cheaper and foolproof method of filling the bowl of the carburetor is to give it a few squeezes after dipping the oil on initial start-up.

A heavy earth cable from the starter motor to the chassis will help to complete the circuit and allow a 6-volt starter to spin at the speed it was designed to. Similarly, a good ground from the battery post to the engine and chassis will do likewise. Make sure all these connections are tight and clean.

If a majority of usage is envisioned to be over shorter distances, and the car is not for serious judging, then consideration may be given to fitting an aftermarket alternator. These are available as both 6- and 12-volt units.

Finally, to the battery itself. Keep it trickle-charged to full capacity when the car is not being used. Recently, I have favored a non-original squarer 6-volt type with twice the cold-cranking capacity of the long, narrow original, which I was able to source at a third of the cost. However, my next battery purchase will be an 8-volt job these being readily available for mobility scooters now, and I am assured that there will be no negative repercussions such as blown 6-volt bulbs or malfunctioning gauges, but that the car will start easier and the lights will be better. This would probably be the single easiest and most effective way of improving a 6-volt starting and lighting system.

SUMMARY

I hope that in the writing of this article I have provided some options and provoked some thinking and maybe discussion with respect to the continued application of 6-volt electrical systems in vehicles that were originally supplied with them. My rationale behind this is to encourage owners to retain the intended look and design of the headlamp pods and lenses, but to also be able to make some modifications behind the glass or under the hood to improve the practical drivability of the vehicle so that it is easy to operate under modern conditions. Any comment, feedback, or further suggestions would be most welcome. clivegluepot@hotmail.com

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32 cp headlight bulbs \$5 each
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Having sold my '37 Special, I have many parts that are not listed. Call maybe I can help you out.

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(See "Tech Tips" in Torque Tube, Mar/Apr 2001 & Sept/Oct 1998.)

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13000 South 68th St,

1938 Century radiator and the stainless strips for the sides of the '38 Century hood

Malcolm Fischer (#1746)

403-742-1663

sandguys@telus.net

1937 Century Convertible Coupe (series 66C):

- Sunvisors - mount to front header of convertible top.
- Stainless moldings for running boards
- Stainless moldings for sidemount tread covers
- Correct inside rear view mirror
- "Split-type" rear window frame (in convertible top)
- Rear extension piece for rumble seat gutter-left side

Also: Digital photographs or similar images showing:

- Correct upholstery pattern for leather front seat
- Correct upholstery pattern for rumble seat
- All aspects of interior behind front seat, including rumble seat area
- Front floor area surrounding pedals

Jon Kanas (#1732)

303-225-7437

kanas@qadas.com

1937 original radio for a model 41

Tim Henderson (#1766)

352-527-6670

Centerline radio book, original or copy is fine, for a 1937 special.

Jerry Pagano (#961)

609-748-2462

1937 Grille in good condition

Phil Hicks (#1799)

707-994-9650

1 trunk deck emblem

1 steel brace that goes under the rear fender to hold on the taillight

2 long bolts for headlamp bucket adjustment

2 brackets that hold the bolt (pictures attached)

Exhaust system original hangers

Fred Muscavitch (#1560) 920-490-3735

1938 Special front bumper center accessory badge "Buick 8"

1938 Radio-good complete condition

Rear deck lid emblem "Buick"

Art Fensod (#1758)

357 Country Lane

Loudon, TN 37774

865-408-0525

1937-40-Phaeton front seat adjustment mechanism, tracks and all.

George Cooper (#1774)

4305 Woodlark Dr. Annandale, VA 22003

703-280-1442

38 66C brake drums.

Walter E. Smith

410-765-6702

we.smith@ngc.com

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1937 100% original with 25,800 miles. It is showroom-new and has a 1996 National first prize winning badge. The car is located in Melrose, Florida (26 miles from Gainesville). We will deliver within 100 miles at no charge. Any further will be at the buyer's expense. I am attaching a few photos. Thanks for your help

Vince Santostefano (#1723)
352-475-1202



1938 Century

1938 Buick Century 4-Door Touring Sedan, Model 61, Style no. 38-4619, Botticelli Blue. Reluctantly need to part with this good runner. Replaced all the electrical, but needs interior and body work to be a show car. \$13,000 OBO. E-mail for pictures.

Pierce psfleming@comcast.net 763-374-1789

1938 CENTURY MODEL 61

1938 Century, 4-door sedan, Model 61, 105,000 miles. VIN 13301314. \$15,000 U.S.

Dual side mounts, fog lamps, fold-down rear bumper guard, newer Lester WWWs.

Older restoration of a 100% complete car, I have a complete ownership history (PA & NY) and shop manual along with several years of *Torque Tubes*. There is a bit of paint peel on the left front fender and paint is thin in a few areas—chrome shows some age, but is complete and shiny—interior is complete and shows very well. The car is an all-around gorgeous example and a winner of many local awards from Central NY and Northern PA (including a Third Place showing at the AACA Memorial Day weekend show in Norwich, NY—one of the largest shows in the Northeast).

This Buick starts, runs, and drives strong—she was my Dad's favorite and I wish I could keep her...too many toys and toddlers in the house. If you would like to give this beautiful old car a loving home please call me. I have a series of digital photos I can e-mail (or print and send) to any interested parties. Car is located in NY and I am in VA—so some coordination will be involved for a showing.

Bill Fowler (#1195)
PO Box 5009 Fort Lee, VA 23801
VoiceMail: 804-721-8472
CW4_Fowler@yahoo.com



CARS FOR SALE

1937 CENTURY M-60C

1937 Century M-60C, 4-dr conv.
Black with tan interior. Needs front seat redone.
Overall body very good-needs attention in truck
area. Top, dash, wheels, front glass and other
things redone. Engine runs great, does smoke a
little. \$15,000 firm. Florida

Bill Stoldt (#1389)
buickbill@msn.com
727-535-5478



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1937 Buick Century Model 61
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James Ratzken
203-746-3630



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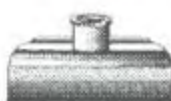
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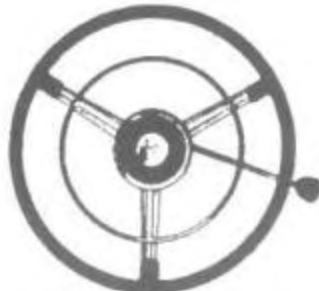
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